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## Four Poems: Snakehead Fish; Departures; Capitol; and Preparations for Southeast Asia

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Volume 2

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## **Four Poems: *Snakehead Fish; Departures; Capitol; and Preparations for Southeast Asian***

by

**Bryan Thao-Worra**

### ***Snakehead Fish***

When the water's wrong  
You just pick up your things,  
Suck in a last breath for the old times  
And walk all the way to a new pond  
So clean you can smell it.

When everything is all right:  
You gobble your neighbors up  
One at a time like a thresher in frenzy  
With a gorged wide-mouth grin,  
Blimping up till you're long  
As a line of five dollar bills.

When we get around to it,  
Your passports will be revoked:  
*Pisces non grata a la America.*

We'll have to go back to Asia  
To eat you.

On the news they say you're  
A tasty reincarnated sinner  
And I wonder how karma works out  
Like that, making a funny fish face  
For my visiting niece  
over a bowl of sour soup.



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***Departures***

The monks gave us a bag of Thai oranges  
Before we left for the States.

Next time we come, we'll have learned more Lao,  
We promise.  
They promise there will be more to show us the next time.

Sitting outside the Khop Jai Deu  
Waiting for our bus to come

Elvis is crooning "Return to Sender"  
Because there's no such number,  
And no such home.

I took a photo of the fountain  
Next to the Scandinavian Bakery,  
Tuk-tuk drivers loitering nearby.

Handing them some fruit,  
They ask, "How long are you staying in Laos?"

And I reply,  
"This is our last day."

The sun looks like it could be peeled wide open  
While I take a bite of a giant orange,

Trying to wring out a last memory from this light,  
Wondering when the King's song is ever going to end

The scent of citrus on my hand  
Sinks deeply past my bones,  
Trying to harden into an anchor

The shape of a kind heart.

***Capital***

Vientiane is a memory.  
I want to use the word buried,  
locked inside my mind  
so tight I barely get  
any visitation hours.

But Vientiane is  
more than a memory.

She's alive  
and so am I.

She's just going on with her life,  
shaking her head at  
my foolish Romanticism-

a stale baguette  
trying to paint her  
when she was a waif.

While she sends me  
a hundred worn photographs  
of her golden spires and muddy feet,  
I admit, I've barely written back,

left to wonder who she's really become  
and would have been,

had I been there the way  
I always think I wanted to.

As if this would make any difference  
worth mentioning in the mornings

of the children born with no memories of me.

***Preparations For Southeast Asia***

There were children whose curt sense of geography  
Calculated our destination just south of Pluto.

Enough turmoil from enigmas. Time for answers.  
Queries to dispel our conjurations of rumor and smoke.

At least we could say “we went,” “we returned,”  
“We did not stay forever.”

Our hummock of a travel agent  
On a corner of University Avenue  
Smiled like a hunter’s moon:

“You don’t need lots of money where you’re going.  
Just a little, and you’ll be living like kings.”

I wanted to utter some vaporous remark  
About the life expectancy of Asian royalty,  
But simply took my passport and tickets

Marveling at our modern keys of paper and numeral,  
Opening doors that might not have been locked as tightly  
As we once believed,

Packing to send our peripatetic hearts hurtling through the atmosphere  
Some 600 miles per hour, bent on finding a home

Our parents alone would recognize.

### About the Author



Bryan Thao Worra is the Laotian American author of *On The Other Side Of The Eye*, *Touching Detonations*, and *The Tuk-Tuk Diaries: My Dinner With Cluster Bombs*. He also volunteers as the literary editor for [Tripmastermonkey.com](http://Tripmastermonkey.com), [Bakka Magazine](http://BakkaMagazine.com) and [AsianAmericanPoetry.Com](http://AsianAmericanPoetry.Com). You can learn more about his work by visiting [www.myspace.com/thaoworra](http://www.myspace.com/thaoworra) or writing him at [thaoworra@aol.com](mailto:thaoworra@aol.com)



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